

## Abject hypocrisy: gender, religion and the self

In 1628 John Earle's *Micro-cosmographie* presented a series of fifty or so contemporary character types, satirising the vices and follies of his age. All but two of these were male. Women, defined by their social roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, could not be readily incorporated into a list of types such as "a mere dull physitian", "an Alderman", or "an upstart knight". The two female characters who make it into the catalogue are "A Handsome Hostess" and a religious woman: "A Shee precise Hypocrite", who "is so taken up with Faith, shee ha's no roome for Charity, and understands no good Workes, but what are wrought on the Sampler". Earle's female hypocrite is represented in a series of stereotypes relating to both femininity and piety. Modesty in dress signifies false pride, and disguises the corruption underneath; she is "a Nonconformist in a close Stomacher and Ruffle of Geneva Print, and her puritie consists much in her Linen". Her chastity is questionable; she "rayles at the Whore of Babylon for a naughty woman", but she "marries in her tribe without a ring", goes miles to hear her favourite preachers, and thinks adultery a lesser sin than swearing. She ill-treats her maidservants while quoting scripture, resents not being allowed to preach, and is greedy – "what shee cannot at the Church, shee do's at the Table, where she prattles more then any against sense and *Antichrist*, till a Capon wing silence her" (Earle [1628] 1811, 94-9). Vain, overbearing and driven by bodily appetites, she represents the performance of virtue with none of the substance.

She is also a durable figure, recurring in books of characters on and off over the next century (many of which echo Earle's), and strikingly consistent in her sins. By 1708 the "Female Hypocrite, or Devil in Disguise" wears the best silk and linen, but "rails at the Women of the World as *Damn'd*, for Wearing Fringes on their Petticoats; and Wears her own *Plain*, that she may take 'em up with *lesser Trouble* and *Inconvenience*". Sexual incontinence is foregrounded here as her primary vice: "wearing *Lace* is a greater Sin in her Esteem, than Fornication, or Adultery [...] in *Company*, she's as Demure as a Saint; but take her Alone, she's as Gamesom as [a li]ttle *Cat* in a *Corner*, and will *Tee-Hee* at a Smutty Jest, and be as Brisk and Obliging, as the Rankest Sinner" (Anon 1708, 7-9).

Women, for these satirists, are all about unseemly appetites, which they are experts in concealing; and religion for them is a useful disguise. As Robert Burton remarks, bad

wives are “saints in shew, so cunningly can they dissemble, they will not so much as look on another man in his presence, so chaste, so religious, and so devout [...] Many of them seem to be precise and holy forsooth” (Burton [1621] 1926, 317-18). Sexual and spiritual untrustworthiness are figured as versions of one another

Hypocrisy in early modern culture is a pervasive but unstable preoccupation. It ties into a set of wider cultural anxieties about dissimulation and pretence, which are particularly insistent at this period; courtiers, clergymen, actors, women, all generate disquiet about how the self may be performed rather than authentic. And as Earle’s female hypocrite suggests, the deceitfulness of women is a natural match for the deceitfulness of puritans in popular satire. The seventeenth century gives a particular spin to the ancient trope of feminine falsehood by attaching it to ostentatious religiosity. Stereotypical Puritans are by no means always female, and nor are stereotypical hypocrites; the lengthy and intense discussions of how to tell if one is a hypocrite in early modern spiritual literature do not focus their attention particularly on women. Nonetheless femininity is a significant element in these discussions. The long-established misogynist tradition that sees women as natural dissimulators, whose outsides are charming but insides repulsive, is readily borrowed by devotional writers, both as description and metaphor: analyses of hypocrisy as a gap between inside and outside lean heavily on the imagery of feminine deceitfulness. The woman’s body figures hypocrisy whether in its fraudulent seductiveness, or in its equally deceptive appearance of piety.

Hypocrisy interrupts the relation between inner and outer: the person you see on the surface is not what you get on the inside. The gap that opens here is a crucial one for religious thinkers of the early modern period. Across two centuries and many different shades of religion, writers of devotional texts, sermons, polemics and autobiographies wrestle with the unresolvable question of how to be sure that what appears to be is the same as what is; that outward virtue is genuinely an index of inward grace. And hypocrisy from a religious perspective has another, still more destabilising meaning, referring not only to those who pretended to piety, but those who mistakenly believed in their own faith, supposing themselves to be elect when in fact they were not. This

makes it a peculiarly anxious, indeed agonising, topic for the many writers in doubt about whether they had true faith (Stachniewski 1991, 91-3). The secrets of the heart, self-examination, self-knowledge, true prayer, true repentance – all these are endlessly debated. Where inner and outer fail to correspond, the reason is hypocrisy.

The uneasy relation between inner and outer also recalls Julia Kristeva's association of hypocrisy with abjection. Abjection in her account is a psychic mode which signifies a disturbance at the boundary between inside and outside, something which troublingly belongs in both places and in neither, something hard to classify. It is also specifically about transgressions of the boundaries of the body: things that move between the surface of the body and its inside are experienced as abject, pushed away (a meaning also active in early modern spiritual writing, where to be abject from the Lord is to be cast off and excluded, as well as cast down and abased). More broadly, abjection is concerned with the clean and the unclean; with law, prohibition and the sacred; with the maternal, and the constitution of the subject (Kristeva 1982).

Kristeva's elaboration of the concept highlights the ambiguity of hypocrisy, both in its performance of discontinuity between inner and outer, and as it is implicated in both body and mind, in ways which resonate with early modern preoccupations. Religious hypocrisy is in one sense a sin of the imagination, comparable to committing the sin against the holy ghost, or witchcraft; it exists in the mind of the person who is or who fears to be a hypocrite. But it is also inescapably an embodied sin. It is about clothes, deportment, gestures, eyes, as well as hidden appetites and secret sins of the flesh; and all these are insistently present in early modern discussions.

For the godly, hypocrisy is a recurrent and complex anxiety. Devotional writers repudiate the identification of religious fervour with hypocrisy, while simultaneously demanding that believers engage in intense self-interrogation to ensure that they are not unwitting hypocrites. Spiritual autobiographers worry over their own failures of sincerity, or identify their earlier religious professions as hypocritical; they attack the hypocrisy of others; they vehemently contradict those who accuse them of it. Anxieties over hypocrisy and dissimulation perhaps have a particular resonance for women. The ideal of the godly woman, offered in devotional texts as a pattern of female virtue, is at

the same time unsettled by her association with dissimulation, and women's innate deceitfulness is often exemplified by their ostentatious religiosity; hypocrisy itself, too, is regularly personified as female. A woman writing an account of her spiritual life is potentially shadowed by association with hypocrisy both as woman and as religious.

This chapter explores some of the ways in which hypocrisy is imagined, embodied and gendered in early modern spiritual writing. In drawing on a range of devotional and autobiographical writings from across the seventeenth century, I have inevitably tended to flatten out and simplify difference, both across time and across confessional boundaries. There are important shifts in the course of the century, in emphasis and interpretation, in doctrine, and in the specific meanings of the term. Nonetheless throughout the period hypocrisy, representing that which is cast out from God and the self, remains a destabilising force lurking at the heart of what should be a pure and solid interior, and a perennial reminder of the unknowability of the subject, whether self or other.

### **Hypocrites by nature: women and puritans**

The assumption that dissimulation is pre-eminently and archetypally a woman's vice, all too familiar in early modern culture (and indeed for many centuries before), is construed as a gap between inside and outside. Women are never what they appear to be; they weep to get their own way; their pretended love deceives silly helpless men into docility; their pretended virtue tricks the same men into marriage, only to discover too late that they have married a fiend. As Joseph Swetnam describes it in his *Arraignment of Lewd Idle Froward and Unconstant Women* (1615):

[...] a woman that hath a fair face it is ever matched with a cruell heart, and hir heavenly looks with hellish thoughts, their modest countenance with merciless minds, for women can both smooth and sooth [...] they beare two tongues in one mouth like *Judas*, and two hearts in one breast ... and all to deceive the simple and plaine meaning men [...]. (Swetnam 1615, 4-5)

And the imagery here highlights how the body itself encodes deceit: beauty and smoothness conceal the two tongues in the mouth, the two hearts in the breast.

The association of women with dissimulation is also pervasive in less openly misogynist texts, not least because (also notoriously) women are very keen on outward display. The decoration of the body is seen as their overriding concern, and the identification of dress with deceit and with women's vices is universal. "Much might be said here concerning the newfangle madnesse, or lascivious pride, or vaine superfluities, of womens pointing, painting, adorning, and fantasticall disguising: but I must say this vice in them to be remedillesse, because it hath bene in every age, ever cried against, and never amended", observes Thomas Wright, discussing how "apparrell of the bodie, declareth well the apparrell of the mind" (Wright 1604, 137-8). Dress encodes many anxieties. Vanity in costume may provoke lust; it may lead to confusion about status, as both men and women put on furs, silks and velvets unsuited to their rank; it may lead even more alarmingly to gender confusion, as men turn effeminate and women wear doublets and hats.

Too much attention to the outside will lead to a neglect of the inside, as Richard Brathwait reminds his readers in *The English Gentlewoman*: "Miserable is the condition of that Creature, who, so her skin be sleake, cares not if her soule be rough. So her outward habit be pure and without blemish, values little her inward garnish" (Brathwait 1641, 277). More seriously, it implies not merely neglecting that inward garnish, but actively concealing the true self: "you are to be *really*, what you appeare *outwardly*", he insists (1641, 330). And as the full title of the book suggests (*The English Gentlewoman, set out to the full body [...]*), it is specifically the body that declares the soul. Brathwait highlights the problem of correspondence between inside and outside, between the adornment of the body and the corruption of the heart:

Many desire to appeare most to the *eye*, what they are least in *heart*. They have learned artfully to gull the world with apparances; and deceive ... with vizards and semblances. These can enforce a smile, to perswade you of their affability; counterfeit a blush, to paint out their modesty; walke alone, to expresse their love to privacy ... Their speech is minced, their pace measured, their whole posture so cunningly composed, as one would imagine them terrestriall Saints at least, whereas they are nothing less than what they most appear. (1641, 335)

The reference to saints is significant; for it is particularly in relation to godliness that Brathwait expects to find deception, as well as where it is most reprehensible. Women's insincerity is written on their bodies, whether by their inability to resist fine clothes, which proclaims their vanity, or conversely by the inner corruption which is concealed by an embodied performance of virtue.

Saintly behaviour masking a devil within is a contrast with a more or less proverbial status. Swetnam refers to women who are "like a Saint abroad but a Devill at home"; Brathwait to those "who are Saints in their tongues, but Divels in their lives" (Swetnam 1615, 63; Brathwait 1641, 384). However the phrase is not restricted to women. Joseph Hall uses the same expression to characterise the pious hypocrite, who is "an Angell abroad, a Devill at home; and worse when an Angell, than when a Devill". This underlines the point that if dissimulation is the vice of women, hypocrisy is the vice of the godly (Hall 1634, 170). That the excessively pious were untrustworthy hypocrites is a standard satirical and theatrical assumption; Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Zeal-of-the-land Busy in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* are among a troop of self-seeking, greedy, avaricious puritans on the early modern stage (Collinson 1995). If for the godly, holy behaviour was a mark of purity within and of separation from the vices of the world, for their critics it was a veil drawn over inner corruption. Beneath an illusory goodness puritans were self-seeking and deceitful, full of hate, greed and lust that they hid from the world, but would happily indulge in secret.

### **Hypocrisy in devotional literature: the inside and the outside**

The popular stereotype of the hypocritical Puritan was thus one that the pious expected to encounter. The Nonconformist minister Richard Baxter warns, "Christians, you must not only *be sincere*, but patiently expect to be *accounted hypocrites*, and pointed at as the only dissemblers in the world: You must not only *be honest*, but patiently expect to be *accounted dishonest* [...] You must not only *be chaste and temperate*; but also patiently expect to be defamed as incontinent and licentious" (Baxter 1660, 254-5). Samuel Torshell, in *The Hypocrite Discovered and Cured*, worries that his book may feed the prejudices of those who scorn religion: "I know that all speech of and against Hypocrisie

is acceptable to prophane men,” he comments, “who [...] doe account every *Professour* to be an *Hypocrite*, and doe hate the godly under this pretence, that they are Hypocrites” (Torshell 1644, 2). And Samuel Crook, in his massive tome on hypocrisy *Ta Diapheronta*, bitterly resents the eagerness with which the ungodly seize on reports of hypocrisy:

Hence those malicious out-cries, veiled over with a seeming sorrow and amazement at the report; *Wot you what? would you think it? such an one* (I heare) *swore an oath, or was taken in a false tale: O! these pure ones; are the vilest people alive; under a shew of sanctity, they commit any wickednesse in the dark, &c.* (Crook 1658, 137)

The contested meanings of godliness in this period are played out in terms of a conflict between surface and inner truth. The principle that holiness is internal, depending on faith rather than deeds, is of course at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. But in practice there is still a widespread expectation that goodness should be realised in good deeds, rather than in good words alone. Inward faith should show itself to the world by shaping outward behaviour; but behaviour in turn must be the index of inner virtue, rather than mere performance. In the absence of visible virtues – charity, benevolence, continence – how could someone be supposed truly elect? But if good deeds were taken as evidence of election, then how could one distinguish between the person who appeared virtuous for hypocritical motives, and the person who truly was so? Hypocrisy is a problem not least because it destabilises the possibility of knowing what your neighbour is really like: the self is not transparent, and the heart (as countless writers note) is only known to God.

The spiritual self is ideally a single and consistent whole, in contrast to the hypocrite’s duplicity. “Sincerity”, declares Thomas Fuller in *The Holy State*, “is an entire thing in it self: Hypocrisie consists of several pieces cunningly closed together” (Fuller 1652, 374). Inconsistency is the mark of the hypocrite. “He is not the same privately, that publickly; betwixt God and himselfe, that before others; at home and abroad ...”, according to Whately. “But the true Christian, he is fixed and constant, always the same, rooted, grounded, established, and doth not give himselfe over to changes and alteration” (Whately 1619, 30). The imagery of deceit dwells insistently on gaps and

discontinuities: this person is not the same before God and before other people, at home and abroad, internally and externally. “[I]n the *carnal religion* of the Hypocrite”, says Baxter, “the *outside*, which should be the *ornament* and *attendant* of the *inward spiritual* part, hath got the *Mastery*” (Baxter 1660, 69-70). The “inward Cells” of those who falsely pretend virtue, according to Brathwait, “like corrupt Charnell-houses, afford nothing but filthiness” (Brathwait 1641, 362). For Thomas Adams the very body of the hypocrite is composed of contradiction: “A man of great Profession, little Devotion, is like a bodie so repugnantly composed, that he hath a hot liver, and a cold stomacke: that which cools the liver, ouerheats the stomacke ... zeale burnes in his tongue, but come neare this gloeworme, and he is cold, darke, squallid” (Adams 1613, 33).

The metaphors through which hypocrisy is explained articulate this discontinuity by opposing the visible with the hidden. A popular image contrasts the outside and the inside of physical spaces – rooms, houses, shops. “Yea, well may the Hypocrite afford gaudy facing, who cares not for any lining; brave it in the shop, that hath nothing in the ware-house”, declares Fuller (1652, 374). The hypocrite’s inner world is an unclean room, as William Whateley explains (*Gods Husbandry*, 1619):

dissemblers looke altogether to their outward or open actions and speeches, not regarding the thoughts and corruptions of their hearts. [...] So then the hypocrite hath little to doe with his heart ... hee takes small paines to resist and oppose, the secret and darke disorders of his soule. But the true Christian finds himselfe to haue a world of labour within [...] A hypocrite (like a slothfull or sluttish seruants) leaues the nooks and corners vnswept, and vncleaned; the true Christian, (as a true loue of cleanlinesse, is carefull to ransacke, and purge euery corner of his soule (Whateley 1619, 32-3).

Such metaphors recur in many accounts: “we white and parget the walles of our profession, but the rubbish and cobwebs of sin hang in the corners of our consciences”, confirms Thomas Adams (Adams 1613, 33).

By some way the commonest metaphor for hypocrisy, though, is appearance, explicitly juxtaposing the outside and inside of the body. Hypocrites appear like the virtuous, but they do so to mislead. “The hypocrite is neat and curious in his religious out-side, but



the linings of his conscience are *filthy and polluted rags*", says Adams, quoting Isaiah 64.6 (1613, 32). For Crook, it is "dishonourable and damnable to put on the external fashion and habit of sober, grave and devout Christians, without the inward substance and vertue". But, he continues, all too common, so long as a reputation for virtue is based on appearance:

never an harlot in the world shall be more disguised, nor more curiously pranked in a religious dresse ... then this smooth-boots in his looks, vesture and gesture, to seem honest, religious, wise, grave, and what not, but what he is? He covers a fowle heart under a fair face; an ulcerous soul under neat cloaths, a wanton heart under a modest habit, and a world of spiritual wickednesse under an affected gravity of carriage and behaviour [...] (Crook 1658, 62)

And as Crook's reference to the harlot suggests, of course, it is in the context of harlots and Jezebels that this metaphor is most forcefully expressed. The foul, ulcerous, wanton interior evokes sexual licence alongside disease to underline the corrupt reality.

Repeatedly, devotional writers articulate the idea of hypocrisy through the image of the painted woman, whose decorated face conceals a rotten inside. For Baxter, "Hypocrisie as the Harlots paint, is but a base and borrowed beauty, that will vanish away when you draw neer the fire" (1660, 116). Evil, for Crook, "as an old *Jezabel* fills up her wrinkles with artificial dawbery"; he contrasts "true vertues, as the army of Christ marching in holy beauty", with "hypocrisie the devils *Jezabel* with her painted visage" (1658, 3, 5). The hypocrite's self-presentation as demure and pious is identified with the harlot's self-presentation as more beautiful than nature has made her: a disguise that aims to entice, indicating a wanton and lustful soul. "The *chastest* woman will *wash* her face", according to Baxter, "but it's the *harlot*, or *wanton*, or *deformed*, that will paint it. [...] a *curious dress*, and *excessive care*, doth signifie a *crooked* or *deformed body*, or a filthy skin, or which is worse, an *empty soul*" (1660, 68-9).

What is also significant about this popular image, of course, is that it reiterates the association of female dissimulation with hypocrisy more generally. Devotional books tend to take the male reader for granted, and the analyses and typologies of hypocrisy accordingly focus on the hypocritical man, although there are occasional references to

female frailty (hypocrisy, notes Torshell, is “most naturall to women”, though “the lesson of both Sexes [...] all ages, and conditions”; 1644, 8). But the insistent feminine figurations – the painted jezebels covering up corruption, the harlots disguising themselves as modest matrons – assimilate hypocrites to women in their use of the outside of the body (dress, gesture, speech) to disguise the sinful inside. Women’s hypocrisy consists in falsely pretending to beauty, as well as to virtue. “If thou beest faire,” demands Stubbes in the *Anatomie of Abuses*, citing St Ambrose, “why paintest thou thy selfe to seeme fairer? and if thou bee not faire, why doest thou hypocritically desire to seeme faire ... ?” (Stubbes [1595] 2002, 109-10)

Along with duplicity and inconstancy, an excessive attention to the outside of the body with the aim of disguising the inside (whether by suggesting more than one’s true beauty, or more than one’s true piety) is thus a connecting thread between hypocrisy and femininity. The destabilising end point of this, of course, is that in the end the appearance of modesty itself becomes proof of its opposite:

whores in old time {Gen. 38.14} did *put on vails*, covering their shamelesnesse with a more then ordinary semblance of shamefac’tnesse, and by that affected modesty were commonly discovered and reputed to be immodest and light [...] (Crook 1658, 62)

The more a woman’s body displays the marks of virtue, in effect, the more sceptical the onlookers should be. Stubbes attacks women’s dress and behaviour not only for vanity but even for attempting to appear modest: “when they have attired themselves thus, in the midst of their pride, it is a world to consider their coynesse in gestures, their minsednes in words and speeches, their gingerlynesse in tripping on toes like young Goates, their demure nicitie, and babishnesse, and withall their haughty stomacks” (Stubbes [1595] 2002, 124). The smooth-boots in neat clothes, the terrestrial saints with blushes and mincing walk, the soberly dressed matrons, all undermine the possibility of reading religion through dress: the codes that ought to identify a person’s allegiances and piety have become unreadable. Godliness, supposedly legible on the body, connotes hypocrisy to the outsider; but even among the pious, where preachers urge their congregations to dress with sobriety, it is easy to be mistaken. “All sober

Christians are friends to *outward decency and order*", Baxter reminds his listeners, but he knows that this friendship is easily faked. "For my part", he concludes, "I shall pronounce no one of you personally to be an hypocrite, as knowing that hypocrisie is a sin of the heart, which in it self is seen by none but God and him that hath it: But my business is only to help such to know and judge themselves" (1660, 144-5).

### **Self-knowledge and its problems**

"To know and judge themselves": how is this to be achieved? For the godly, accusations of hypocrisy in the sense of wilful deception were less troubling than the agonising possibility that one might be the other kind of hypocrite – the kind that doesn't know it. As Richard Baxter points out, "besides the *gross* Hypocrite that knoweth he doth *dissemble*, and only deceiveth others, there are also *close* Hypocrites, that know not they are hypocrites, but deceive themselves" (1660, 49). Is godly conduct actually self-flattery, wishing to appear good in the eyes of others or even oneself, rather than evidence of true faith? The dizzying downward spirals of self-analysis generated by such questions are part of the preoccupation with truth and inwardness that characterises the autobiographical writings of the seventeenth century. How to know that one is truly what one claims and wishes to be is a complex matter.

Devotional writers throughout the century thus warn of the dangers of over-confidence among those who "know not themselves to be Hypocrites, but think themselves in a good estate and sound enough", as Torshell describes them (1644, 7). Self-satisfaction is perilous:

There are a number of professors of religion in the Church, of whom all that know them, have a very good opinion: supposing them to be most worthy Christians; yea, which in their owne hearts doe verily thinke of themselves, that they be indeede the sonnes and daughters of God, and that they serve him, and not themselves; when as in very deed, they doe nothing else but couson themselves, and the whole world; for within, they also are very rottennesse, and serve themselves alone, and not the Lord Jesus Christ (Whateley 1619, 22)

Crook similarly warns of the fatal possibilities of error:

it concerneth every man to know his own estate and not to hood wink himself through wilful blindness [...] thinking and presuming that he hath faith, and hath believed in God ever since he could remember[...] Such even while they believe are Infidels. They be not the men they take themselves to be, they do not the thing which they suppose they do, as shal anon appear. (1658, 281)

“They be not the men they take themselves to be, they do not the thing which they suppose they do” – this is surely a fundamental challenge to the possibility of self-knowledge.

The differences between the hypocrite and the sincere Christian are extraordinarily hard to detect, because they are inward rather than outward. Thus Timothy Rogers explains, “In all outward actions, as Prayer, Hearing, Giving to the Poor, and the like, there may be a very great resemblance between a true Christian and an Hypocrite” (Rogers 1691, 294). Thomas Cooper opens *The Estates of the Hypocrite and Syncere Christian* with a dissection of the similarities between the two which seems to suggest that the hypocrite will look not just convincing, but possibly more convincing than the real thing. The hypocrite not only “*In shew* [...] hath whatsoever the regenerate possesseth; nay he many times in shew goeth *beyond him*”, but also “*In substance* hee hath much common with the regenerate, as first, communion of outward meanes of religion, the *Word, Sacrament, conference, example, &c.* Secondly, use of outward means, for this life in an outward manner, and for externall ends.” On top of this he has “*Faith temporarie*”, which gives him a misleading security, and even “*In Substance* he hath some graces, even beyond the Elect. As he may do *Miracles*, and have extraordinarie knowledge of manie mysteries” (1613, 6-8):

Yea, he may *live* all his daies in prosperitie; that so hee may the rather flatter himselfe in the worth of his profession: and he may *die* in a glorious carnall peace, to the great stumbling of the world, and abusing of his vaine heart [...] (1613, 13)

Reeaders took such reminders to heart; in the British Library copy an early reader has underlined the final phrase in this passage.

The solution Cooper offers, classically, is self-examination and self-knowledge. “Labour wee, *sound and perticular knowledge of our estate*, and measure, by daily *viewing* our selves in the glasse of the word, and *examining our hearts*, and privie corruptions” he urges (1613, 44). The hypocrite who fails to recognise his condition, explains Whateley, does so “because out of his abundant selfe-love [...] hee is loath to bestow paines, in searching and examining his owne heart” (1619, 23-4). The Baptist Jane Turner advises pursuing true inner knowledge as a guard against hypocrisy, recommending “meditation, self-watching, self-judging, self-humbling and prayer, which are indeed such duties, as no hypocrite can do” (Turner 1653, 185). Self-knowledge, in principle, should be the means to uproot one’s own hypocrisy; it must be possible to find out that one is a hypocrite. “There is no hypocrite so cunning as to hide himself absolutely from himself”, asserts Crook (1658, 9):

Neither man, woman, nor devil can deceive thee with danger to thy soul, unless thine own heart be in the plot. Only by this a man becomes a seducer, a devil to himself [...] (1658, 12)

But how to identify the heart’s complicity remains a problem. Given the impossibly blurred boundary between the two conditions, it is no wonder that professors struggled over the question of their own status. If one could live in prosperity, following religious duties, believing in one’s own salvation, and eventually “die in a glorious carnall peace”, how was anyone to know with any confidence whether their own faith was well founded, or whether the traces of sin and hypocrisy that they inevitably detected were in fact fatal?

The books that attempted reassurance on this subject were often anything but reassuring. The signs of religion may themselves be signs of hypocrisy; a self-examination that fails to find anything wrong is simply a self-examination that has not gone far enough. “[W]ho will totally clear himselfe? let me tell thee, if thou doest, thou art the worst hypocrite”, declares Thomas Adams, in his 1612 sermon *The White Devil, or the Hypocrite Uncased*; “[...] he that sayes, he hath not sinned in hypocrisie, is the

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rankest hypocrite” (1613, 28). Adams does concede that not everyone who sins in hypocrisy is in fact a hypocrite, but still this is not a rhetoric calculated to comfort the anxious. Even those whose actions are entirely virtuous may still be hypocrites; everyone must acknowledge in themselves “the stinking guzzle of original sin” (Whateley 1619, 50), and their unworthiness to be saved. Uncleaness is pervasive:

the hypocrite [...] imagines, that no more evill abideth within, than shewes it selfe without [...] Now the true Christian [...] knowing the loathsome foulness of his owne heart, and being well acquainted with the bottomlesse quagmire of his owne originall corruption, is still humble and base in his owne eyes (Whateley 1619, 60).

The hypocrite does not know himself as internally filthy – as abject, indeed; and abject also from God.

Whateley’s conclusion highlights once again the difficulty of preserving a balance between confidence and fear, and the limitations of self-knowledge:

[...] be jealous over your selves, feare much, suspect much, enquire much, and prevent the evill of securitie. I doe not wish you always to stand in suspence of your selves, and still to bee doubtfull, whether you bee true Christians or dissemblers; it is no part of my meaning, to drive you unto this uncomfortable uncertaintie. But I wish you not to make too much haste, to thinke your selves certaine, for feare your certaintie should prove but a certaine delusion. (1619, 85)

For many it seems likely that uncomfortable uncertainty was the best they could hope for. To be secure, in this theology, is never a good thing.

### **Hypocrisy in spiritual autobiography**

How do the godly deal with these problems of self-knowledge and uncertainty? In particular, how do godly women, doubly identified with deceit, position themselves in relation to the idea of hypocrisy? While devotional writers focus on what might be

called the technical meaning of hypocrisy, involving unwitting self-deceit, the common understanding of the hypocrite as someone wilfully performing virtue while covertly pursuing their own interests remains prominent, adding to the negative weight of the word. So it is perhaps not surprising that the identification of the self as hypocrite seems to be relatively unusual. To confess to hypocrisy is a fundamental attack on the integrity of the self and the truth of one's religious profession; and for the writers of spiritual autobiography, integrity and sincerity are crucial. If the hostile ungodly world accuses saints of hypocrisy, the task of spiritual autobiography is to demonstrate the eventual coherence of inner and outer. Spiritual autobiographers emphasise their manifold imperfections and spiritual struggles, but ultimately the narrative must demonstrate that the writer has achieved true faith, and writes from a place of certainty. Hypocrisy is thus located somewhere else: in the past, in the world, in demonic temptation. Any uncomfortable uncertainties are narratively positioned as overcome.

In the progressive narrative of spiritual autobiography, often characterised by a series of supposed conversions which turn out to be mistakes, earlier versions of the godly self may eventually be recognised as hypocritical. Bunyan, after his first reformation of manners, amazes his neighbours with his "great conversion", but it is not genuine: "But, oh! [...] I was nothing but a poor painted hypocrite" (Bunyan [1666] 2008, 13). Anna Trapnel, in the grip of "spirituall idolatry", was much attached to forms and duties, and "delighted in the thunderings of the Law", before recognising that she had been "as full of heart hypocrisie as I could hold" (Trapnel 1654, 4, 7). In a more reserved identification of the self as hypocritical, others place it as something they worried about, but (implicitly) did not need to. Katherine Sutton evidently spent some time studying contemporary writers on the topic. "I was much stirred up to mind," she recounts, "*how far an Hypocrite might go in Religion*: And I began to consider, whether I had gone any further than such a one might go, for I saw plainly that a person might go very far, and yet be in a sad state, though they may be enlightened and tast of the heavenly gift, and be partakers of the holy Spirit [...] and also hear the best Preachers gladly [...] and yet be but almost a Christian.". As she exclaims, "Oh, what a knotty place was I to work upon!" (Sutton [1663] 2001, 3-4).

The devil plays an active part here; it is often suggested that he was behind anxiety over hypocrisy. Sarah Davy describes how Satan “would often persuade me I was a *hypocrite*, and that I was fallen from grace”, but God helps her overcome this belief (Davy 1670, 9). Satan similarly told Vavasor Powell “that I was a Reprobate, and let me profess what I would, my Damnation was sure, and my hypocrisie, and sinnes under profession, would be worse than any other sinnes” (Powell 1671, 9). Hannah Allen, convinced throughout her long period of melancholy that she has always been a hypocrite, with hindsight explains her self-accusation as a result of satanic suggestion. Hypocrisy in her narrative is always associated with the devil, and frequently with delusion. Allen’s recovery depends on her acknowledging not that she is a hypocrite and must move on to a truer faith, but that she is (at least implicitly) among the elect, and need not attend to devilish delusions. She has imagined a discontinuity between her inner corruption and her outward behaviour which is not in fact there. When she assures her friends that she is “given up to work all manner of wickedness with greediness”, both she and they imagine the nature of her sin as a question of what is internal and what is external:

*We see no such thing in you, would some say; I would Answer, Aye, but it is in my heart; Why doth it not break out in Act? say they, It will do ere long; said I. (Allen 1683, 50)*

Instead, however, the queasy horror at what lurks inside waiting to break out is eventually defeated by her recovery from melancholy. Satan’s role here is to bring hypocrisy, or the fear of hypocrisy, inside the self; the sufferer must then find a way of getting rid of it.

Another way of displacing hypocrisy beyond the borders of the self is to locate it as the vice of others, and particularly in the communities of the profane. For the godly, hypocrisy is a mark of worldliness. The Quaker Susannah Blandford describes herself as one “not loving Hypocrisy, nor a feigned imitation whereby I might deceive others, in what I was not truly to God”; Elizabeth Stirredge attributes hypocrisy more comprehensively to everything that she as a Quaker wants to separate herself from, believing “that the Lord would *Redeem* a People out of the *World*, and its *Ways*, and



*Customs, Language, Marriage, and Burying, and All the World's Hypocrisy*" (Blandford 1698, 11; Stirredge 1711, 19).

An intriguing example of such distancing is to be found in the writings of the Anabaptist Anne Wentworth, who in the 1670s published a series of prophetic and autobiographical texts. In the first of her published works, *A true account of Anne Wentworths Being cruelly, unjustly and unchristianly dealt with by some of those people called Anabaptists* (1676), Wentworth inverts the association between women and deceit. Identifying hypocrisy implicitly with her husband (whom she had left), and explicitly with the male elders of her church, she locates herself as a pure and truthful person beset by dissemblers. Her husband, she claims in language that invokes the imagery of the clean outside and the polluted inside, is no true Christian:

I know no gross sin that he is addicted too, nor never heard he was before he took up that form of Religion, to wash his body in water, the outside of the cup and platter, which stood in the least need, when his soul was never yet washed from the filth of his inbred natural corruption [...] I dare be bold to affirm that he never yet knew the new birth, the life of the new man; nor they must needs be no Saints or Christians in deed and in truth, nor know the new birth themselves, if they take him to be one that is born again, and examine but his carriage to a Wife this 23 years, not his carriage to the World before men, for that is fair enough; but what is it in secret, that God hath seen all along, and is angry at [...] (1676, 7)

The distinction between public and private self is portrayed as an embodied performance of virtue – cleansing the outside with the “form of Religion”, but leaving the soul in filth. By contrast what speaks in Wentworth’s own behaviour is her inward truth. “I am not a woman spending my time in the pleasures and vanities of the World,” she declares, “and what my manner of life and conversation is, that is seen and known” (1676, 11). Truth also speaks in her body’s external collapse. Twenty years of “being a dark, blind, formal professor”, who “yet thought I was as zealous, and strong ... as any”, left her both metaphorically and literally wrecked: her “dry, barren soul [...] eat up with blind zeal, and my soul starve for hunger” (1676, 14) literalised itself in the heat and aridity of fever:

[I] was consumed to skin and bone, a forlorn sad spectacle to be seen, unlike a woman; for my days had been spent with sighing, and my years with crying, for day and night the hand of the Lord was heavy upon me, and my moisture was turned into the drought of Summer. *When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long*, having an Hectiff Fever, which came through so great oppression, and sorrow of heart; and wanting vent, and smothering it so long in my own brest, grew so hot, and burnt so strong, that I was past all cure of man [...] (1676, 9)

This depiction of the body merges spiritual and humoural languages. Psalm 32.3-4 (which she quotes here) corresponds to the bodily experience by which the passions determine bodily health, and hectic fever is the result of sorrow. Weeping out her grief over many years, Wentworth is dried and heated into a fever; as a woman, too, constitutionally moist and cool, it is her female flesh that is consumed, leaving her “unlike a woman”.

Wentworth’s illness enacts precisely the correspondence in her of inner and outer, of soul and body: her embodiment of spiritual desolation demonstrates the truth and coherence of her entire being, in contrast to her husband’s clean outside that in no way reflects his interior. The church elders, who are allied with this inwardly filthy husband, are similarly excluded from knowledge of true religion. In their attacks on her, she declares sarcastically, “there was either the truest piece of Christianity acted towards me, or else the greatest piece of Hypocrisie, Formality, and Idolatry”. God’s anger has been kindled, “and ere long he will blow it up into a Flame, so as all Formalitie and Hypocrisie shall tast and feel”. Sensual experience will enforce a recognition of the distance that has grown between the inside and the outside, so that like her the elders will experience integrity (or its absence) as knowledge in the flesh (1676, 17).

For Wentworth, moreover, the conflict between her and these formal hypocrites is explicitly a gendered one. Her church, dominated by men, refuses to accept the justness of her cause, because of her sex:

[...] I know no Man that is willing that God should Plead my cause, or that the Lord should discover Proud, Impious, hard hearted Men, and lay open Hypocrisie and formality, and look upon a poor weak despised Woman, that is trampled under the feet of men ... they would rather have her Soul and Body lost and damned to all Eternity, as they have proved it themselves in what they have done to me [...] (1676, 19-20)

And in reiterating her own integrity she underlines further the nature of this opposition:

[...] this doth not come to the view of the World with eloquence of speech, nor any artificial dress, but in plainness of speech, in its own Mothers tongue, not set forth and adorned with the wisdom of men [...] (1676, 21-2)

Here she echoes the repeated association of hypocrisy with artifice and adornment, only to turn it on its head. Eloquence and decorative flourish is the wisdom of men; but she, the woman, will speak with simplicity, with (in a move that would surely have pleased Kristeva) her own mother's tongue refuting the words of men.

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Hypocrisy as a spiritual sin is closely entangled with the feminine, both as a set of shared qualities – duplicity, dissembling, attention to the sleek outside of the body rather than its inner cleanliness – and as a rhetorical trope which highlights the discontinuity of the body's inside and outside through the metaphor of the painted woman. But it is also an unknowable condition; relegated to the body's inside, as a sin of the imagination, it is a constant threat to the integrity of the self. Once again Kristeva's characterisation of the place of sin is evocative:

evil, displaced into the subject, will not cease tormenting him from within, no longer as a polluting or defiling substance, but as the ineradicable repulsion of his henceforth divided and contradictory being. (Kristeva 1982, 116)

This is about the shift from Old to New Testament, and sin replacing defilement. But the sense of defilement and pollution still attaches to sin, in the texts I have been discussing,

precisely in the context of hypocrisy: the unclean inner space which unsettles the subject, refusing it knowledge of itself or of others. The hypocritical subject is not only divided and contradictory; he is ignorant of the extent of his division; he does not know that there are parts of himself he does not know about. Hypocrisy is where the great project of self-knowledge that drives so much spiritual autobiography collapses, as Samuel Crook's formulation makes clear ("he is not the man he thinks himself to be"); it is, in a perverse and abject way, a precursor of the unconscious. Hypocrisy, "crooked, self-covering and self-consuming", as Whateley describes it, masks the self from the self (1619, 14).

Hypocrisy, I suggested earlier, is a sin of both mind and body; one that is paradoxically invisible, and focused above all on appearance. For early modern women in particular, it offers an ambiguous and problematic language to speak about the self. If in certain ways women were vulnerable to the figure of the hypocrite as dissimulator, its opposite could also offer a route out of conventional negative views of the feminine. The language of the true-hearted and sincere Christian, refocusing the gaze on inward truth, allows godly women to disown and distance themselves from the duplicitous feminine body that belongs to the hypocrite, as they distance themselves from bodily adornment in favour of plainness. Indeed, as with figures like the Whore of Babylon or the women who must not speak in church, reinterpreted within the sects as symbolising corruption in established religion, the dissembling woman is repudiated by actual women in favour of an assertion of integrity. If Wentworth is a lone voice in the explicitness with which she reinscribes the tropes of hypocrisy onto the masculine, she nonetheless speaks for many in asserting her integrity, and claiming to speak as subject rather than abject. Whether flesh and devil – the abject, as it were – can be so unconditionally pushed away, however, is another matter.

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